

## Midwest Fatality Experience on All Roads

In the Midwest, as of the end of 2004, five states had raised their speed limits beyond 65 mph (Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska and South Dakota) and three states did not (Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin). Speed limits were not only raised on Interstate roadways, but also expressways and many rural, two-lane roadways.

Since all five states who raised their speed limits beyond 65 mph now have seven years of fatality data following the speed limit increase, a study was conducted using the last seven years preceding the speed limit change (1989 through 1995) and the first seven full years following the speed limit change (1997 through 2003). Data from Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin, which did not increase their speed limits above 65 mph, were also included in this study for comparison purposes. 1996 data was not used because it was a transition year for higher speed limit states.

Minnesota changed its speed limits in 1997. It is still used in this study as one of the states that raised its speed limits since the same years could be used (the years 1989 through 1995 are used as the latest seven years before the speed limit change and 1997 to 2003 are used as the seven years “after” the speed limit change). Table 1 displays average annual fatalities for the states surveyed.

**Table 1 Seven Year Fatality Averages for the Periods Before and After Raising Speed Limits: 1989-1995, 1997-2003**

| States that Did NOT change<br>Speed Limits Beyond 65 mph |         |         |        | States that DID Change Speed<br>Limits Beyond 65 mph |         |         |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|--------|------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|--------|
| Average Annual Fatalities                                |         |         |        | Average Annual Fatalities                            |         |         |        |
| State                                                    | 1989-95 | 1997-03 | Change | State                                                | 1989-95 | 1997-03 | Change |
| Iowa                                                     | 481     | 449     | -32    | Kansas                                               | 426     | 492     | +66    |
| Illinois                                                 | 1529    | 1422    | -107   | Minnesota                                            | 578     | 626     | +48    |
| Wisconsin                                                | 744     | 771     | +27    | Missouri                                             | 1041    | 1164    | +123   |
|                                                          |         |         |        | Nebraska                                             | 266     | 291     | +25    |
|                                                          |         |         |        | South Dakota                                         | 152     | 170     | +18    |
| Totals                                                   | 2754    | 2642    | -111   | Totals                                               | 2463    | 2536    | +280   |
| Ave. Change (per state)                                  |         |         | -37.0  | Ave. Change (per state)                              |         |         | +56.0  |

Table 1 includes Iowa and the six surrounding states and Kansas. As stated earlier, five of the states have raised some of their speed limits above 65 mph; three states have not. This table displays the average yearly fatalities for the years 1989-1995 (before) and 1997-2003 (after). The one exception is Minnesota, who raised their speed limits in 1997. The data years for Minnesota are the same, however. These fatality numbers were used to calculate the percentage rate of increase and decrease in traffic fatalities for the states in the study (see Table 2).



**Table 2 Change in Total Traffic Fatalities from 1989-95 to 1997-2003**

| States That Did <b>NOT</b> Change<br>Speed Limits Above 65 mph |       | States That <b>DID</b> Change Speed<br>Limits Above 65 mph |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Iowa                                                           | -8%   | Kansas                                                     | +13%   |
| Illinois                                                       | -7%   | Minnesota                                                  | + 8%   |
| Wisconsin                                                      | +4%   | Missouri                                                   | +11%   |
|                                                                |       | Nebraska                                                   | + 8%   |
|                                                                |       | South Dakota                                               | +11%   |
| Overall Change                                                 | -3.7% | Overall Change                                             | +10.2% |

Table 2 shows that the seven-year average for fatalities in Iowa and Illinois (states that did not increase their speed limits beyond 65 mph) decreased. All five states with speed limits higher than 65 mph show an increase in traffic deaths that ranges from nearly 8 percent to 13 percent. Wisconsin, which did not raise its speed limits beyond 65 mph was the only state in that group to show an increase in traffic deaths. But its percent increase was half of the lowest percent of increase in the states which raised their speed limit beyond 65 mph.

An analysis of fatalities from 1989 to 1995 and 1997 to 2003 reveals the collective fatality experience for Midwest states that did not raise speed limits above 65 mph was a 3.7 percent decline in traffic deaths, while states that did raise speed limits above 65 mph experienced a 10.2 percent increase in traffic fatalities.

These multi-year data are consistent with both multi-year data published in previous years' reports and single year reports since 1997. Preliminary data for the year 2004 shows a continuation of the trends found in this report.

For More Information Contact:  
Scott R Falb  
Research & Statistical Analysis  
Office of Driver Services  
Iowa Department of Transportation  
Ph: 515-237-3154  
E-mail: <scott.falb@dot.iowa.gov>